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Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

UNAIDS in country: 1996 Status Assessment
Progress Report

October, 1997

I   Executive Summary

The UNAIDS secretariat conducted a survey of UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS after the programme's first full year of operation.

The objectives of the survey were:

- To help UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS assess developments during 1996 and highlight the factors that contribute to the obstacles and success of UN system coordination on HIV/AIDS;
- To help the UN system in country and at headquarters and the UNAIDS secretariat identify key objectives and priority activities for the future;
- To provide data for the UNAIDS programme performance monitoring system which will include annual reporting by all sections of the programme.

Ninety-one UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS responded to the survey, which was based on a framework developed to guide and assess Theme Group development. This framework includes a set of indicator activities, which are divided into four phases including a) making the Theme Group operational; b) ongoing information exchange among Theme Group members; c) coordinated action and d) joint action. Most Theme Groups reported significant development in the first two phases and limited development in the last two phases.

Theme Groups were asked to identify the main obstacles to progress and the main factors in success. The obstacles most frequently cited referred to the lack of support from UNAIDS and the headquarters of the six cosponsors. Other often cited obstacles related to the capacity of the UN system at country level to handle their new role. The strong commitment to coordination and good working relationships among Theme Group member agencies as well as the support and involvement of cosponsor country representatives including the UN Resident Coordinator were reported to be important factors of success. The support provided by CPAs, UNAIDS focal points and the HIV/AIDS focal points of Theme Group members were also reported to be essential factors in the effective functioning of Theme Groups.

Theme Groups were also asked to identify priority activities for 1997. Resource mobilization was one of the top priorities reported by Theme Groups.

II   Introduction

A   Background

The creation in 1996 of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) reflects both a new way of addressing HIV/AIDS and a new way of working within the UN system. The global mission of UNAIDS, as the main advocate for worldwide action against HIV/AIDS, is to lead, strengthen and support an expanded response to the epidemic. At the same time, UNAIDS is the UN reform in action. Cosponsored by six UN agencies, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank, UNAIDS reflects the determination of the UN system to better integrate activities at country level.

UNAIDS in countries comprises of the joint action and collective resources of the six cosponsors and other concerned UN agencies at country level with the support provided by the UNAIDS secretariat. UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS, including technical working groups, are the principal mechanism for collaborative and coordinated work on HIV/AIDS by the UN system. The main role of Country Programme Advisers (CPAs), UNAIDS focal points and teams of inter-country technical experts is to advise and support the UN system through the Theme Groups. In several cases, Theme Groups manage funds for country level activities. Finally, with the assistance of the UNAIDS secretariat, Theme Groups provide countries with links to forums of global policy and research.

The UN theme group is not a mechanism that is unique to UNAIDS. In many countries, UN theme groups work on subjects such as population, gender, environment and basic education. However, UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS are the only theme groups with a formal mandate and a cosponsored Programme to support them. Established during 1996 and 1997, UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS have often become the forerunners of collaboration and coordination within the UN system.

The pioneering role of UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS is one that is filled with opportunities. It is hoped that they will serve as examples of successful collaborative achievement within the UN system. At the same time, such an innovative role is also filled with challenges for individual Theme Groups as well as the headquarters of the six cosponsors and the UNAIDS secretariat.

B   Objectives of survey

The underlying rationale for a survey of UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS during the first full year of operation of UNAIDS was to better understand some of these challenges.

The objectives of the survey were:

- To help UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS assess developments during 1996 and highlight the factors that contribute to the obstacles and success of UN system coordination on HIV/AIDS;
- To help the UN system in country and at headquarters and the UNAIDS secretariat identify key objectives and priority activities for the future;
- To provide data for the UNAIDS programme performance monitoring system which will include annual reporting by all sections of the programme.

The goal of the survey was not to grade individual Theme Groups. Each Theme Group was established and operates in a unique context. The nature of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the organization and mobilization of the national response and the presence of the UN vary from one country to the next, making it difficult to compare one Theme Group to another. The survey provided information for

individual Theme Groups to assess themselves as well as providing an overall picture of Theme Group development.

C   Response to survey

The survey entitled *UNAIDS in country: 1996 Status Assessment* was distributed to 126 Theme Group Chairs in English, French and Spanish during the last week of January 1997. Theme Group Chairs were urged to complete the survey with other Theme Group members and provide a frank assessment of Theme Group development during 1996.

Ninety-one Theme Groups responded to the survey. The response rate by region appears in Table 1. A list of the individual countries whose Theme Groups responded to the questionnaire is found in Annex 1.

Table 1
Responses to Survey by Region

Region	Number of Theme Group responding to survey	Number of Theme Groups asked to respond	Response Rate
Africa and Middle East	46	63	73%
Asia and Pacific	18	22	82%
Europe	11	19	58%
Americas	16	22	73%
TOTAL	91	126	72%

III   Framework for guidance and assessment of Theme Group activities

A framework was developed to guide and assess Theme Group development in the collaboration and coordination of HIV/AIDS related efforts at country level (Table 2).[1] The framework was formulated in consultation with partners within UNAIDS, including Theme Groups.

This framework is based on a continuum and assumes that as Theme Groups proceed through four broad phases of activities (ie. movement from left to right of the continuum), greater levels of effort and commitment towards a joint and collective UN response are required. Each phase in this continuum includes numerous activities. In the framework, a number of these activities have been selected to serve as indicators of Theme Group development. The framework loosely suggests a progression of activities. It also recognizes that one phase does not replace previous ones, and that a Theme Group may re-cycle through phases.

A   Phase 1: Theme Group Operational

The first phase includes activities relating to the establishment of Theme Groups. This phase includes activities that constitute a firm foundation for Theme Groups to build on. It includes activities such as adopting objectives; agreeing on the responsibilities of members; formulating plans of action; and establishing mechanisms to ensure financial support.

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[1] The proposed framework continues to undergo refinement and adaptation. Figure I depicts the current working version of the framework.

B   Phase 2: Ongoing information exchange among Theme Group members

The second phase includes activities that consolidate the Theme Group as a mechanism. It includes activities that increase the Theme Group's understanding of the mandates and capabilities of member agencies. It also includes activities that increase the Theme Group's understanding of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in general as well as the nature of the epidemic and its response in the country. It includes activities such as taking inventory of UN activities on HIV/AIDS; creating a calendar of key events organized by cosponsors; and educating members on HIV/AIDS issues.

C   Phase 3: Coordinated action

The third phase includes activities that harmonize the programmes and activities of the Theme Group member agencies. It also includes coordinated activities that strengthen and support the national response. It includes activities such as establishing coordinated HIV/AIDS workplace programmes; adopting a coordinated approach to communicate with the government; adopting a coordinated approach to mobilize resources; and developing a UN strategy to address HIV/AIDS as well as an integrated UN workplan on HIV/AIDS.

D   Phase 4: Joint action

The fourth phase includes activities that reflect a formal alignment of programming requirements and cycles among Theme Group member agencies. It includes activities such as joint planning, monitoring and evaluation of Theme Group member agencies; providing coordinated assistance to national strategic planning; and developing administrative mechanisms to support these joint technical actions.

Table 2
Framework for Guidance and Assessment of Theme Group Activities

Theme Group Operational	On-Going Information Exchange Among Theme Groups	Coordination Action	Joint Action
TG objectives and functions agreed	Active creation among the cosponsors of a common understanding of each other's mandates, comparative strengths and modus operandi	Commonly agreed advocacy and cosponsor's roles	Mechanism in place for joint sectoral technical review, planning, monitoring and evaluation
Chair designated and functions and relationships of TG members and RC understood and agreed	Inventory of UN activities on HIV/AIDS conducted	Coordinated HIV/AIDS workplace programmes	Administrative mechanisms in place where and if needed, for supporting joint action
TG plan of action prepared and agreed	Members of TG and TWG informed on HIV/AIDS issues	Coordinated approach adopted to communicate with government	Coordinated assistance provided to national strategic planning
T WG* created with ToR** and descriptions of its members adjusted accordingly	Country situation analysis conducted	Coordinated approach adopted to mobilize resources	
Mechanisms created to ensure financial and other support for TG operations	Cosponsor's calendar of key events created noting planning exercises, evaluations, programme reviews and consultations	UN strategy and integrated workplan on HIV/AIDS articulated	

* Technical Working Group
** Terms of Reference

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## IV   Results of 1996 Status Assessment

In the survey, Theme Groups were asked to review this framework and identify each activity as a) completed, b) underway, or c) not an activity in 1996. One of the limitations of this survey was that it concentrated on gathering information on the status of Theme Groups. It sought very little baseline information on the pre-existing factors that facilitated or impeded the establishment and development of Theme Groups.

A   Phase 1: Theme Group operational

Most Theme Groups reported that the activities included in the first phase were completed and many reported that these activities were underway (See Figure 1). There is only one activity in the first phase in which progress was more limited. Sixty percent of Theme Groups reported that they had not established mechanisms to ensure financial and other support for their own operations.

Theme Groups that reported the establishment of mechanisms to ensure financial and other support for their operations were asked to describe their efforts. Several Theme Groups reported that resources had been pooled to hire a staff member to support the joint UN effort. One Theme Group reported that an agreement was signed by five Resident Representatives to contribute funds to coordinate the administration of the Theme Group with the UNDP country office entrusted to manage the funds. One Theme Group reported that a Memorandum of Understanding was developed and signed for the joint financing of its operations and implementation of its action plan. Another Theme Group reported that the UN Resident Coordinator established a Trust Fund mechanism based on existing structures.
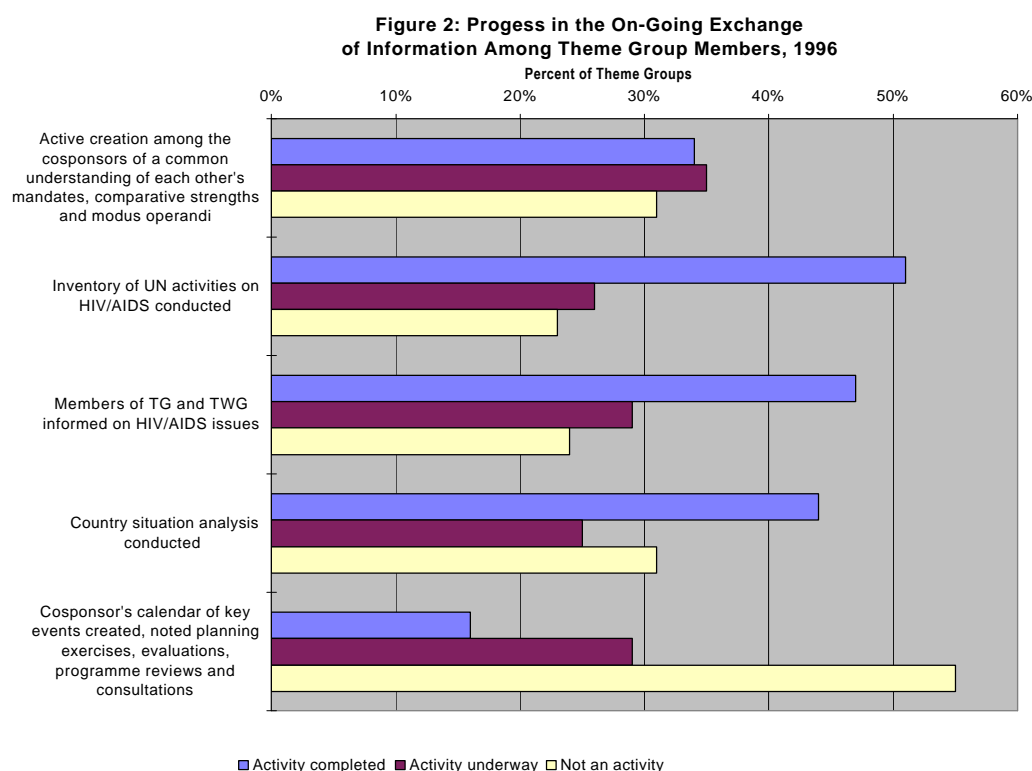
Figure 1: Progress in Making the Theme Group Operational, 1996
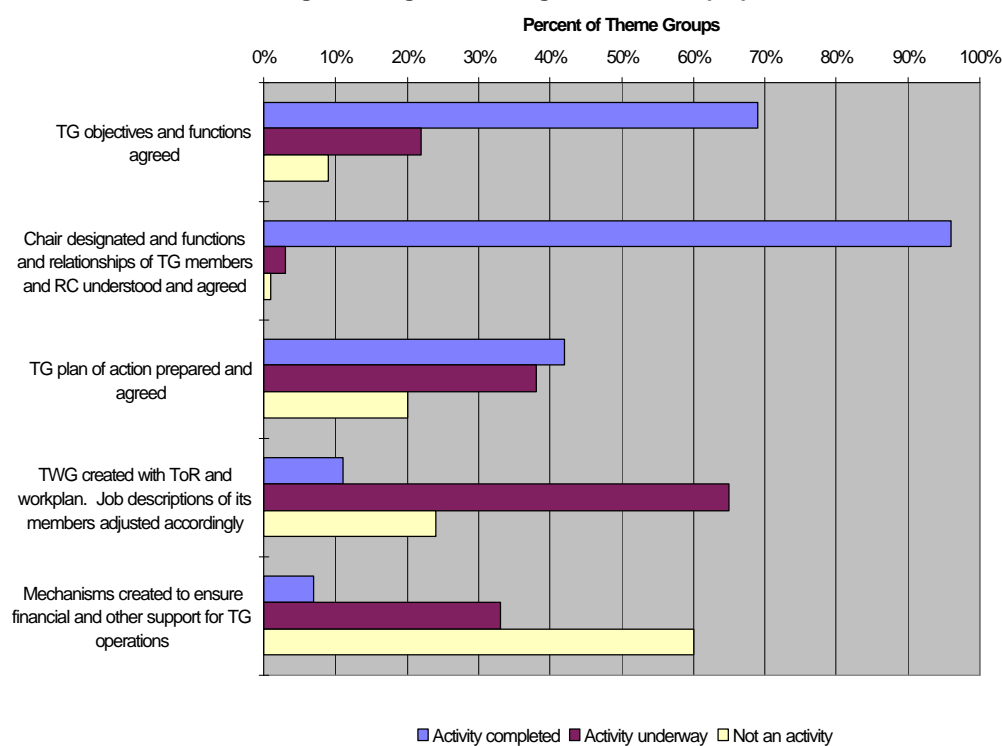
B   Phase 2: Ongoing information exchange among Theme Group members

The reported status of activities included in the second phase is similar to that reported for activities in the first phase. Between 30% and 50% of Theme Groups reported that the activities included in the second phase were completed and many reported that these activities were underway (See Figure 2). There is only one activity in the second phase in which progress by most Theme Groups was more limited. Fifty-five percent of Theme Groups reported that they had not created a calendar noting the key events of cosponsors.

Given that 1996 was the first year of the programme, it is encouraging that most Theme Groups reported activities in the first two phases as either completed or underway. The UNAIDS secretariat also provided support to Theme Groups in many of these activities. It provided guidance on the roles and functions of Theme Groups and held workshops on this subject in each region. Similarly, it was during 1996 that most CPAs were placed in countries and UNAIDS focal points were appointed by the cosponsors.

**Figure 2: Progess in the On-Going Exchange
of Information Among Theme Group Members, 1996**

Percent of Theme Groups

□ Activity completed ■ Activity underway □ Not an activity

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C   Phase 3: Coordinated Action

Most Theme Groups reported that activities included in the third phase of the coordinated framework were underway and many reported that these activities were not activities for them during 1996 (See Figure 3). Only a small percentage completed most of the activities included in this phase. No Theme Group, however, reported progress in the development of a UN strategy to address HIV/AIDS as well as an integrated UN workplan on HIV/AIDS.

Theme Groups were requested to provide a brief description of activities that were either completed or underway. These examples, some of which are included below, illustrate that though progress in this phase was less pronounced than in the first two phases, a number of Theme Groups have achieved a great deal in the area of coordinated action.

Coordinated approach adopted to communicate with government, donors and others: Government officials particularly national AIDS programme managers and staff were included in either the Theme Group or the Technical Working Group in several countries. A few Theme Groups convened special meetings and retreats with high-level officials to discuss the nature of coordinated and joint UN action on HIV/AIDS and the national response. One Theme Group reported that its operational framework was discussed and endorsed by the government, donors and main NGOs.

Coordinated approach to mobilize resources: Only a few Theme Groups used informal and regularly scheduled donor meetings to mobilize resources in support of the national response. Several Theme Groups reported the organization of special resource mobilization sessions, often in conjunction with the presentation of the results of national programme reviews and strategic planning activities.

Coordinated assistance for national strategic planning: In several cases, Theme Group members had supported situation analyses and programme reviews as well as the preparation of strategic plans. Other Theme Groups reported the provision of technical and financial assistance for the preparation of national strategic plans, programme reviews, workshops and other for a contributing to strategic planning, programme and policy design. One Theme Group reported the participation of its members in an external programme review and task force with a special emphasis on government structure and preparation for strategic planning. Another Theme Group reported the provision through UNDP of technical assistance to develop the national strategic plan and guidelines for sector responses including a national plan consensus workshop and support for a donor resource mobilization meeting.

UN strategy and integrated workplan on HIV/AIDS articulated: Joint planning of activities and close involvement in the preparation of national programme workplans were reported by several Theme Groups. A few Theme Groups reported that once the workplan was finalized, it served as a framework for the UN system to discuss and fund select activities.

Figure 3: Progress in Coordination Action Among Theme Group Members, 1996

Percent of Theme Groups

Activity completed ■ Activity underway □ Not an activity
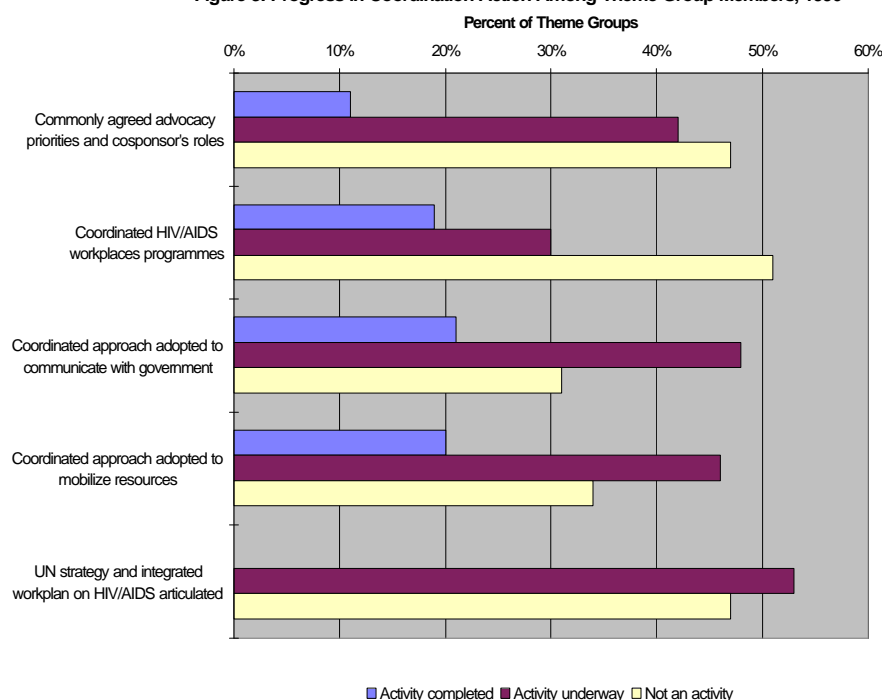
D   Phase 4: Joint Action

More than half of the Theme Groups had not addressed activities included in the fourth phase of the coordination framework (See Figure 4). Though a significant number of Theme Groups reported that these activities were underway, only few had completed these activities.

Figure 4: Progress in Joint Action Among Theme Group Members, 1996

Percent of Theme Groups

■ Activity completed ■ Activity underway □ Not an activity
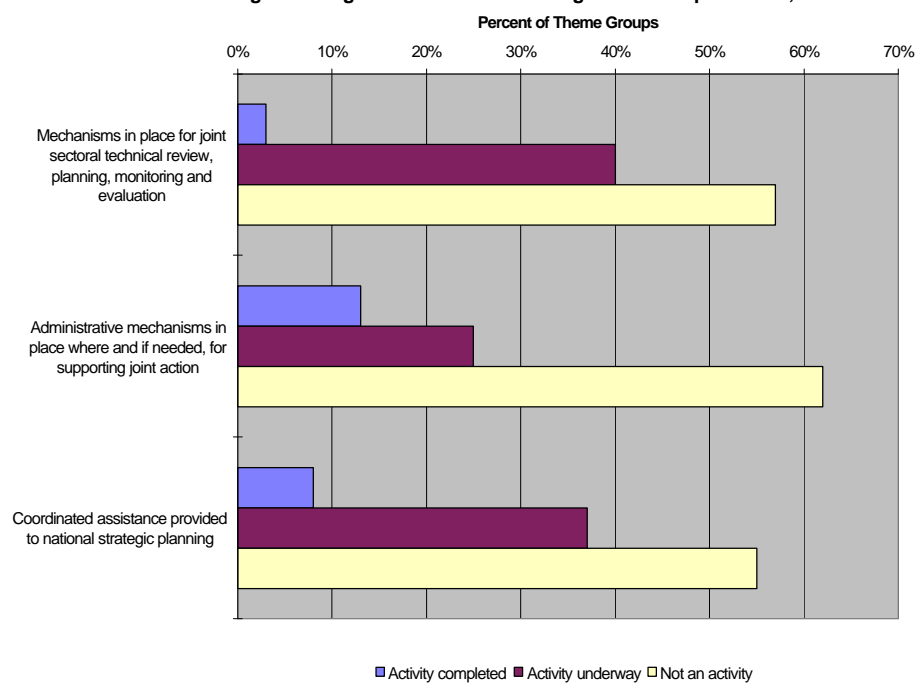
V   Data on obstacles to progress, factors in success and priority activities for 1997

Theme Groups were also requested to provide information on the following: 1) to describe three main obstacles or constraints to the operation of the Theme Group in 1996; 2) to describe three key factors that contributed significantly to the Theme Group progress or the achievement of planned activities and 3) to describe priority activities in 1997. Their answers provide some insight into the "whys" relating to the responses of the previous section.

A   Obstacles to progress

Obstacles reported referred to the UNAIDS secretariat, some referred to the headquarters of the six co-sponsors, to the government and the national AIDS programme, and some to the Theme Group itself (See Table 3).

The obstacles most often cited referred to lack of support from UNAIDS and the headquarters of the six cosponsors. The most frequently cited obstacle was the lack or the delay in acquiring full time staff devoted to the HIV/AIDS responses of UN agencies. Many Theme Groups also pointed to a lack of understanding on UNAIDS; particularly on the respective roles of UN agencies within a joint programme. Lack of clarity and guidance from headquarters and the secretariat was another ever-present theme regarding interaction between Theme Groups and the headquarters of cosponsors.

The insufficient technical, institutional and financial capacities of the UNAIDS cosponsors, as well as the considerable additional workload imposed by the Theme Group mechanism were cited as internal factors.

Table 3
Obstacles to progress identified by Theme Groups*

Rank	Obstacle	Pct. of Theme Groups identifying obstacle
1	Lack of or delay in acquiring full-time staff devoted to the HIV/AIDS responses of UN agencies.	30 %
2	Lack of understanding on UNAIDS particularly on the respective roles of UN agencies within a joint programme.	29 %
3	Lack of clarity on procedures and delays in disbursing core funds from UNAIDS	19 %
4	Workload of Theme Group members precludes more active involvement in Theme Group activities and follow-through.	18 %
5	Lack of independent funds for Theme Group to jointly plan and programme	15 %
6	Difficulties in Theme Group dynamics related to inadequate participation, unwillingness to share information and to commit resources in a joint and complimentary manner.	13 %
7	Administrative delays and staff turnover within government programmes.	12 %
8	Lack of guidance and articulation of mandate from headquarters of cosponsors	11 %
8	Weaknesses in national HIV/AIDS programme and/or lack of clarity in national policies and priorities	11 %
8	Limited UN representation in country	11 %

*Total number of responses = 208.

B   Factors in success

The strong commitment to coordination, strong motivation in staff and good working relationships among UN Theme Group member agencies was by far the most frequently cited factor in the success of Theme Groups, as was the active support and involvement of the UN Resident Coordinator (See Table 4). Pre-existing coordination mechanisms among agencies and multiple agency support for HIV/AIDS programmes were considered a preexisting foundation upon which to build UNAIDS. The work of CPAs, UNAIDS focal points and HIV/AIDS focal points of Theme Group members also appeared to be essential factors in the functioning of Theme Groups.

Another key factor cited by Theme Groups was the role played by the national authorities. Good collaboration and support of the national authorities as well as the inclusion of government and other national actors in the Theme Group were viewed as positive factors in its development.

Table 4
Factors in Theme Group progress*

Rank	Factor in progress	Pct. of Theme Groups identifying factor
1	Strong commitment to coordination and good working relationships among Theme Group member agencies particularly the involvement of Country Representatives	40 %
2	Pre-existing coordination mechanisms among agencies and multiple agency support for HIV/AIDS programmes	23%
3	Facilitating and coordinating role of the Country Programme Advisors, UNAIDS focal points, and HIV/AIDS focal points	23%
4	Strong motivation of individuals within Theme Group member agencies	20%
5	Good collaboration and support of the national authorities	18 %
6	Regular meetings of Theme Group	15 %
7	Inclusion of government and/or NGOs in Theme Group	14 %
8	Active support and involvement of the UN Resident Coordinator	13 %
9	Support and backstopping from UNAIDS in Geneva	12 %
10	Strength of government policies and programmes in HIV/AIDS	11%
10	Specific mechanisms to assist/advance coordination (i.e. common premises, sub-regional Programme Development Meeting, cost-sharing mechanism, development of UN strategic plan, database with "institutional memory" of HIV/AIDS activities of Theme Group members)	11 %

*Total number of responses = 203.

C   Priority activities for 1997

The leading activities planned by Theme Groups for 1997 can be grouped under two headings (See Table 5).   The first category of planned activities includes activities related to Theme Group development and joint UN actions.   The second category includes those activities providing direct support to the national response.

Most of the priority activities reported for 1997 were under the first category.   Many Theme Groups planned to take steps to further operationalize the Theme Group by creating action plans or forming a Technical Working Group.   Resource mobilization was a priority for 27%, advocacy activities for 25%, development of relationships with key partners including NGOs and bilateral development agencies for 17% and the creation of mechanisms to conduct joint planning for 13%.

Regarding activities in support of the national response, one third of Theme Groups planned to assist strategic planning and support policy and programme development.

Table 5
Priority activities for 1997*

Rank	Priority activities for 1997	Percent of Theme Groups reporting activity
1	**Theme Group development and joint activities**	
	a) further operational the Theme Group through developing workplans or action plans; creating a UN Technical Working Group or in some cases, constituting a Theme Group	33 %
	b) resource mobilization for the national response	27 %
	c) advocacy (general, among national leadership, or for an expanded national response)	25 %
	d) defining and further developing relationships between Theme Group and partners in country (NGOs, private organizations, bilateral donor agencies, regional programmes)	16 %
	e) developing mechanisms for and conducting joint planning	13 %
	f) general improvement of coordination	13 %
	g) develop mechanisms for pooling resources and administrative procedures for the Theme Group	12 %
	h) expanding/integrating HIV/AIDS activities within Theme Group member agencies	11 %
	i) conduct inventory of UN activities on HIV/AIDS	9 %
2	**Assistance to/support of national response**	
	a) assist strategic planning and support to policy and programme development	29 %
	b) general programme support through training and capacity development	21%
	c) assist information, education and communication activities	15 %
	d) conduct/assist situation and trend analyses, sentinel surveillance and evaluation activities	11 %

*Total number of responses = 273

VI   Preliminary quantitative evaluation of Theme Group development during 1996

The descriptive analysis above provides information on the activities undertaken by individual Theme Groups as well as an overall picture of Theme Group development. It is however difficult to use for any sort of comparative analysis, be it over time or between regions, since such an analysis would have to include a large set of questions to be looked at separately.

In an effort to address these constraints, a standardized scoring system is being developed. This system tries to aggregate achievements in the different framework activities into a standardized score. Aggregation inevitably means loosing some specific information. The scoring system cannot take into account the very different contexts within which each of the Theme Groups were set up and function. Moreover, because the scoring system entails the aggregation of so much data, one can easily imagine a scenario in which two Theme Groups are assigned the same score but are actually at different stages of overall development. Nonetheless, the scoring system may provide further insight into the overall status of Theme Groups. It facilitates analysis to identify programmatic factors that are associated with both more advanced and lesser advanced stages of Theme Group development. It also makes it easier to compare the status of Theme Groups over time.

A   Preliminary scoring system

The preliminary scoring system is based on three assumptions. The first assumption relates to the coding of the survey responses. Activities identified as completed are coded as 1. Activities identified as not an activity are coded as 0. It is assumed that on average, activities underway are at the mid point between activities that are completed and activities that are not began. Activities identified as underway are therefore coded as 0.5.

The second assumption is that within each phase of the framework there are certain activities that are more difficult to accomplish than others. All activities within one phase are therefore not weighted equally. Those activities within a phase that are considered more difficult to complete are attributed a weight that is higher than that attributed to activities that are considered more easily completed.

Finally, the third assumption is that greater levels of effort and commitment are needed as Theme Groups proceed from the left to the right of the framework. Activities in Phase 3 and 4 are considered more difficult to accomplish than activities in Phase 1 and 2. Activities in Phase 4 are considered by far the most difficult to complete. To reflect this assumption, the weight of each activity in Phase 3 and 4 is multiplied by 2 and 4 respectively.

The activity score is calculated by multiplying the response code times the weight of the activity times the weight of the framework phase. The score per phase equals the sum of the activity scores for that phase. The total score equals the sum of the 18 activity scores within the framework.

A standard method to express achievements in scoring systems such as this one is to calculate the score achieved as a percent of the maximum score achievable. This can be done for the total score achieved for all four phases. In order to get more specific details on the status of Theme Groups this can also be done for each individual phase.

Table 5
Framework for Guidance and Assessment of Theme Group Activities with Proposed Weights

Theme Group Operational	Activity Score	On-Going Information Exchange Among Theme Groups	Activity Score	Coordination Action	Activity Score	Joint Action	Activity Score
TG objectives and functions agreed	1	Active creation among the cosponsors of a common understanding of each other's mandates, comparative strengths and modus operandi	1	Commonly agreed advocacy priorities and cosponsor's roles	(2x2)=4	Mechanism in place for joint sectoral technical review, planning, monitoring and evaluation	(2x4)=8
Chair designated and functions and relationships of TG members and RC understood and agreed	1	Inventory of UN activities on HIV/AIDS conducted	2	Coordinated HIV/AIDS workplace programmes	(1x2)=2	Administrative mechanisms in place where and if needed, for supporting joint action	(1x4)=4
TG plan of action prepared and agreed	2	Members of TG and TWG informed on HIV/AIDS issues	1	Coordinated approach adopted to communicate with government	(1x2)=2	Coordinated assistance provided to national strategic planning	(2x4)=8
TWG created with ToR and descriptions of its members adjusted accordingly	2	Country situation analysis conducted	3	Coordinated approach adopted to mobilize resources	(3x2)=6		
Mechanisms created to ensure financial and other support for TG operations	3	Cosponsor's calendar of key events created noting planning exercises, evaluations, programme reviews and consultations	2	UN strategy and integrated workplan on HIV/AIDS articulated	(3x2)=6		

B   Results of the 1996 Status Assessment

As of December 1996, Theme Groups had achieved an average of 20 points for all four framework columns out of a maximum of 57 points. This means that they achieved an average of 36 % of the maximum score achievable. This varied significantly across regions. Theme Groups in Europe achieved an average of 24% of the maximum score, and in Africa and the Middle East they achieved an average of 40% of the maximum score.

The percent of maximum score achievable within each phase also varied significantly. During 1996, Theme Groups achieved an average of 51% of the maximum score for Phase 1 (See Figure 5a). The percent of maximum score achieved gradually declines with each additional phase as one moves from the left to the right of the framework. Theme Groups achieved an average of 26% of the maximum score for Phase 4. It is expected that during the next few years, the percent of maximum score achieved for each phase will even out. The percent of maximum score achieved per phase also varied significantly across regions (See Figure 5b).

Figure 5a
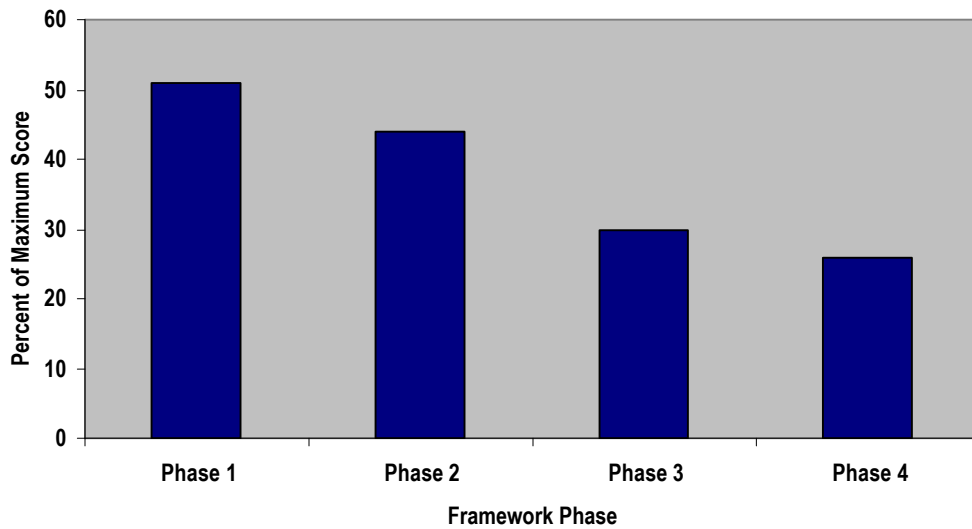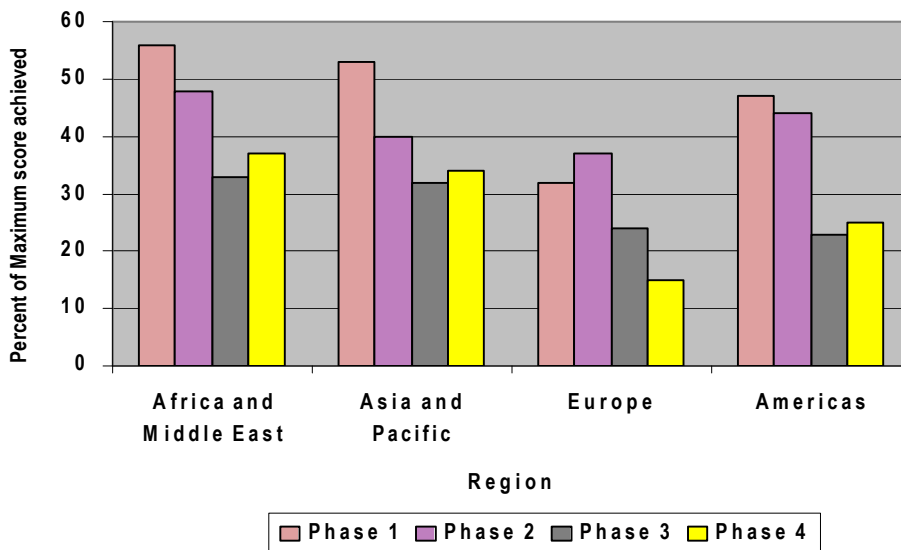**Progress in 1996, by Framework Phase**

Figure 5b
Progress in 1996, by framework phase and by region

This analysis raises questions regarding the comparatively lower score achieved by the European region. There are a number of possible explanations for this. We know that until recently, the United Nations system has had limited involvement in the region. Moreover, in general, Theme Groups in the European region were established later than in other regions.

As mentioned above, the scoring system does not provide any information on the many possible reasons underlying the scores calculated. It cannot be stressed enough that the scores are in no way a

reflection of the work accomplished by Theme Group Chairs, Theme Group members or cosponsors in the different regions. What this analysis does, however, is raise some important questions.
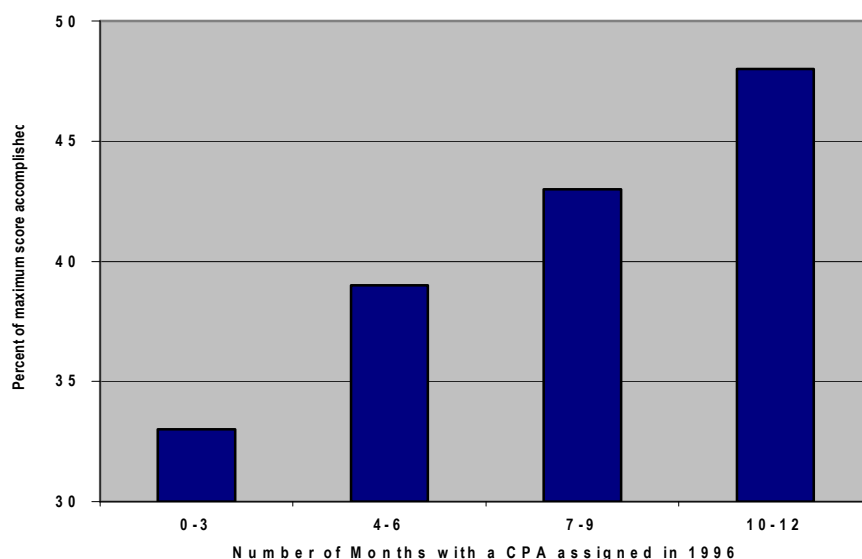
C   UNAIDS Country Programme Advisors

In a preliminary effort to identify programmatic factors that are associated with both more advanced or less advanced stages of Theme Group development, the score system was used to examine situations where UNAIDS Country Programme Advisors (CPAs) were in a country for some time compared to situations where there was no CPA or the CPA was only in the country for a short time (See Figure 6).

According to this analysis, the average percent of maximum overall score achieved by Theme Groups increases in proportion to the number of months that a CPA has been assigned in the country. Theme Groups that had a CPA assigned during 10 to 12 months achieved an average of 48% of the maximum overall score. In contrast, Theme Groups that had a CPA assigned during 0-3 months achieved an average of 33% of the maximum overall score.

This correlation as such cannot be interpreted as a causal link since confounding factors could be the reason for the observed association. For example, CPAs could have been assigned to certain Theme Groups because they were functioning well enough to fully benefit from the support of such a person. Alternatively, the presence of a CPA could have influenced the responses to the survey.   Nonetheless, a "dose-response" like result is usually a strong indicator of a causal link and suggests that the assistance of a CPA supports Theme Group achievement.

Figure 6
Average Achievement of Theme Groups, by number of month with a CPA assigned

Percent of maximum score accomplished (y-axis, 30 to 50); Number of Months with a CPA assigned in 1996 (x-axis): 0-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12

VII   Discussion

The first year of any programme is bound to be filled with challenges for all of its stakeholders. The challenges faced by UNAIDS were destined to be even more complex because UNAIDS reflects both a different perspective on HIV/AIDS and a new way of working within the UN system.

The 1996 Status Assessment provided a better understanding of the development of Theme Groups which is the principal mechanism for a coordinated UN system effort on HIV/AIDS in a country. It raises important issues regarding the strengths and weaknesses of Theme Groups and provides information that should facilitate the work of Theme Groups and those that support them. As importantly, the survey can provide insight to guide the process of country level reform within the UN system at large.

A   Limitations of 1996 Status Assessment

Any discussion of the 1996 Status Assessment must recognize that the exercise did have some limitations. First, it was a self-assessment which may introduce a degree of subjectivity. Secondly, most questionnaires were not completed as a collaborative effort between all Theme Group members. Responses indicate that most forms were completed by the Theme Group Chairperson with the assistance of the CPA or UNAIDS focal point, without the input of the other Theme Group members. Only one-third of the surveys were conducted with Theme Group review and discussion.

Whereas an overall response rate of 72% was achieved, it is likely that there is a response bias towards more active Theme Groups. Thus the results reported above may not be representative of all Theme Groups whether active or inactive.

The 1996 Status Assessment cannot be used to judge the performance of individual Theme Groups and the UN system in the country concerned.   In addition, the 1996 survey focused on assessing performance on a number of specific activities and outputs, without addressing the rationale behind that achievement. Theme Groups that achieve low scores in extremely complex situations may actually have developed much more than those that have higher scores in much more accommodating environments.

B   Results of 1996 Status Assessment

These limitations notwithstanding, the following conclusions can be made from the survey. The first conclusion is that a good foundation has been established for developing joint and cosponsored UN action on HIV/AIDS in many countries. Most Theme Groups reported that the activities included in the first two phases (making the Theme Group operational and ongoing information exchange among Theme Groups) were completed and many reported that these activities were underway.

Achievement in the phases requiring higher levels of coordination (coordinated and joint action) was more modest. Given that most Theme Groups were established during the course of 1996, the division between the achievements in the two later phases is to be expected.

The second conclusion is that Theme Groups and their member organizations, the UNAIDS secretariat and the headquarters of the six cosponsors each have a role to play in the functioning of Theme Groups. Improvement of administrative procedures by the UNAIDS secretariat is now underway.

As requested by the Programme Coordinating Board (PCB), the UNAIDS secretariat is currently developing with its cosponsors concise guidance for Theme Groups based on the results of this survey and on further experience accumulated in 1997.

Thirdly, the motivation and action of key individuals, especially the Theme Group Chairs and the UN Resident Coordinators were clearly important factors in progress. Whereas individual commitment is a key factor in all endeavors, it is equally critical that the UN system provides an enabling and rewarding environment for staff involvement in coordinated activities. For example, participation in the Theme Group could be included in the staff appraisals for cosponsor country staff. Also, incentives could be created for cosponsor staff and Theme Groups who exemplify both commitment and action to coordinate their efforts.

To improve the exchange of information between cosponsor headquarters and country staff on Theme Group involvement and activity, a mechanism could be established for country representatives to report to their headquarters on activities of the joint Programme. The HIV/AIDS Update prepared annually by UNFPA might serve as a model. The HIV/AIDS Update provides a description of UNFPA programme priorities in HIV/AIDS, an estimate of the total UNFPA budget expended on HIV/AIDS activities, and a summary description of both country and regionally based HIV/AIDS activities.

Fourth, CPAs seemed to have contributed significantly to the development of the cosponsored Programme in countries.

Finally, several Theme Groups pointed out the growing gap between the needs created by an expanded AIDS epidemic and available international resources as well as the need for resources in cosponsoring organizations to further jointly plan and programme. Therefore, resource mobilization is now among the top priorities of Theme Groups.

In order to assess the continued development of the joint and cosponsored Programme in countries, another survey will be conducted in 1998. This survey will retain some of the features of the 1996 Status Assessment so that the data collected in 1998 will be comparable with those collected in 1997. The next survey will gather information on the status of individual Theme Groups. It will also focus more on the factors that influence their development. It will be field tested at the end of the year and sent out to Theme Groups by early 1998.

ANNEX I

RESPONSES FROM UN THEME GROUPS ON HIV/AIDS BY COUNTRY AND REGION

Africa and the Middle East Region
Benin
Botswana
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cameroon
Central African Rep
Chad
Comores
Côte d'Ivoire
Djibouti
Egypt
Eritrea
Ethiopia
Gambia
Ghana
Guinea-Bissau
Iran
Iraq
Jordan
Kenya
Lebanon
Liberia
Madagascar
Malawi
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Nigeria
Oman
Sao Tome and Principe
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
South Africa
Sudan
Syria
Swaziland
Tanzania
Togo
Tunisia
Uganda
Yemen
Zaire
Zambia
Zimbabwe
European Region
Albania

Armenia
Azerbaijan
Belarus
Bulgaria
Latvia
Moldova
Poland
Romania
Russian Federation
Ukraine

Americas Region
Argentina
Barbados
Colombia
Costa Rica
Cuba
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
El Salvador
Guatemala
Jamaica
Mexico
Panama
Paraguay
Suriname
Uruguay
Venezuela

Asia and the Pacific Region
Bangladesh
Bhutan
China
Cambodia
India
Indonesia
Korea
Laos
Malaysia
Mongolia
Nepal
Pakistan
Papua New Guinea
Philippines
Samoa
Sri Lanka
Thailand
Viet Nam